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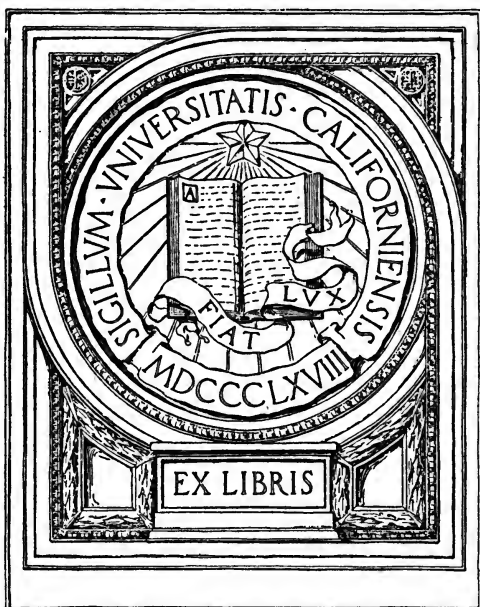


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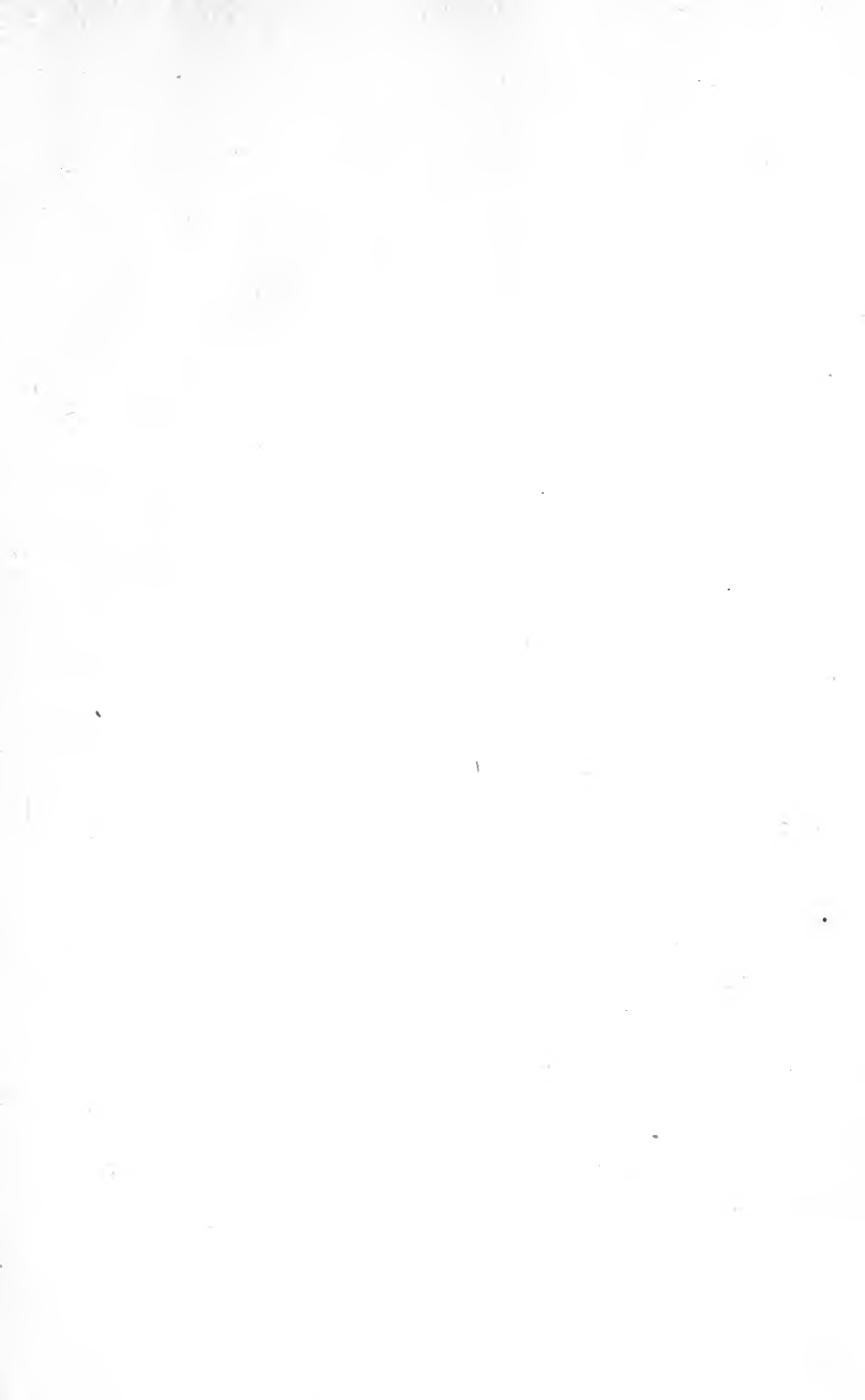
Barham Beach

Julia Ditto Young.

GIFT OF



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BARHAM BEACH

A Poem of Regeneration

—By—

JULIA DITTO YOUNG.



A stainless gentleman,
Who never yet hath uttered any word
Less whitely true than what the angels breathe
Nighest the throne.



Second Edition

May 18th, 1908.

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Gift of

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Buffalo, New York.

Author's Notes.

“June, 1895.

“At my home, 391 Bouck Avenue, Buffalo, May 1st, 1895, was begun Barham Beach. It was not written quite with the headlong speed of its predecessors, the first rough draft not being completed till June 10th. The first and only MS. was finished June 20th at The Nest, Mrs. Lavinia M. Oberst's cottage at Crystal Beach, Canada, and was the next day sent over to the city for the inspection of Mr. William McIntosh, Editor of the Evening News, who is our valued friend and adviser. The poem contains 1,998 lines in nineteen parts; no two consecutive parts are in the same form or meter. The writing of Barham Beach was throughout an unmixed delight.”

April, 1908.

During the thirteen years which have elapsed since the following pages were written, they were preserved in the Erie County Savings Bank, Buffalo, N. Y., and in the First National Bank of Caledonia, Livingston County, New York, at the home of Francis and Eliza Blakeslee.



TO LAURIE.

Works by Mrs. Young.

Adrift, A Story of Niagara: A Novel.

Dedicated to William Dean Howells.

A very taking story. The descriptions of the falls and river of Niagara are not less fascinating than the human interest of the book.—Albany Journal.

Thistle Down: Poems.

Dedicated to Margaret McKenna Ditto.

We wonder if this poet had in mind the Galatea of Theocritus when she wrote *Thistle Down*? Her verses have the trembling, airy grace we see in harls and gossamers. Some of the pieces have the quality of genius.—Maurice Thompson in *The Independent*.

Glynné's Wife: A Novelette in Verse.

Dedicated to Robert D. Young.

Probably the rarest of all the Roycroft publications.—New York Times.

It is said the author felt the romance and pathos of Mr. Vanderbilt's waiting on his yacht "Valiant" for the news of Mrs. Vanderbilt's marriage to Mr. Belmont, and out of that incident the charming fiction grew. The story is of very unusual merit from every standpoint, and one in which the powers of the poet, the novelist, and the moralist are singularly combined.—A. Jeffrey in *Brooklyn Citizen*.

These lines have the genuine Byronic flavor, and are in places as voluptuous of color and form as Keats.—Walter Storrs Bigelow in *Boston Transcript*.

The Story of Saville: Told in Numbers.

Done into a book at the Roycroft Printing Shop which is in East Aurora, opposite the sign of the Black Bull. Dedicated to Thomas Hardy.

A glittering, musical, beautiful poem.—Arthur W. Austin in Buffalo Commercial.

A romance woven with heart-breaking skill.—Kate Burr in Buffalo Times.

Black Evan, A Tale of the '45: In Verse.

Dedicated to All Whose Hearts Thrill at Highland Song or Story, and More Particularly to the St. Andrew's Scottish Society of Buffalo.

She sings, like Virgil, of things divine, love, chivalry, and God.—Rev. J. E. McGrath.

The first stanzas are a magnificent painting of gold, crimson, and amethyst, and the tale matches the brilliancy of autumn in its gorgeous phraseology and royal splendor of word and thought.—Esther Chaddock Davenport.

Mrs. Young is the legitimate successor of Owen Meredith.—Mark S. Hubbell, in "Truth."

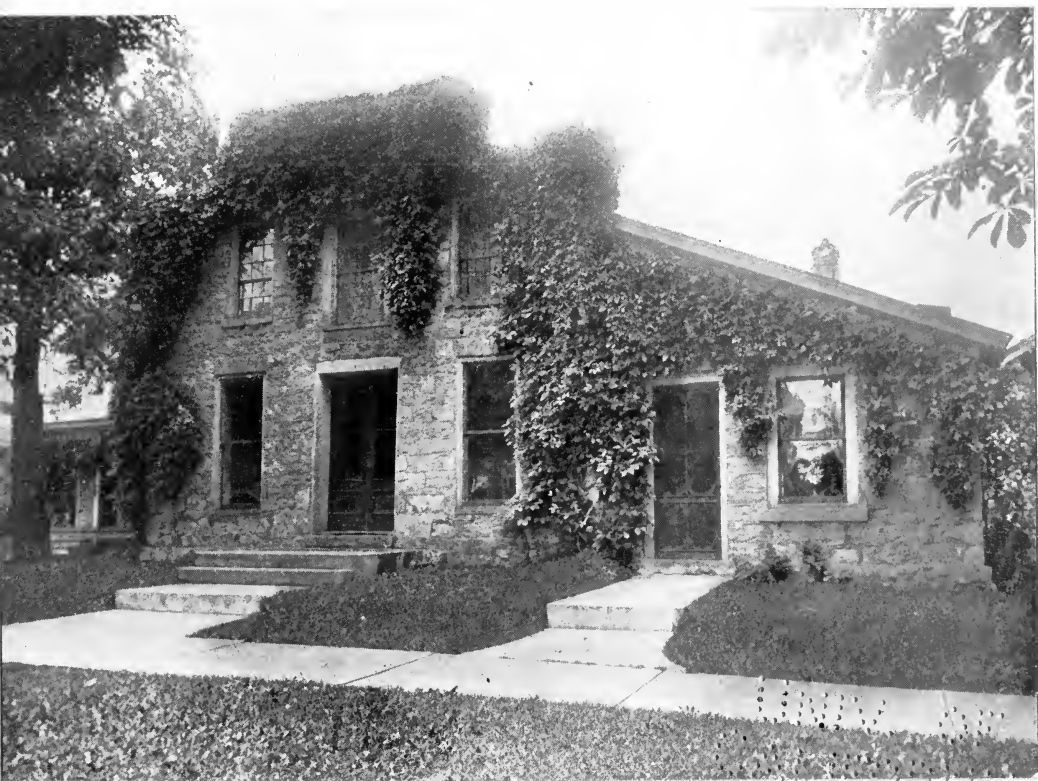
Extract From Letter.

Mount Kisco, New York.

July 13th, 1895.

Barham Beach will give you a place in English Literature in the line of the worthies of the centuries who have written immortal words, words which the world will not let die until the world itself dies and goes darkling out in space, a perished planet.

MARGARET EMMA DITTO.



BLAKESLEE HOUSE.

Of the second edition of Barham Beach
there were 500 books printed, and this is Copy
Number

494

Julia Ditto Young

no. 494
Barham Beach

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BARHAM BEACH

I



Barham Beach

I.

O CITY, ruined city! Was it lightning's levin-brand
That flashed in fury through thy streets, thy fanes and
forum grand,

Or did a prisoned Titan writhe in cataclysmic throe
And shatter all thy rainbow towers and lay thy glory low,
Or was thy fall the rotten fruit of some mad devil's spite
Who helped man's work a hundred years, to spoil it in a
night?

Fair city, wretched city! In that thou wert more fair
Than all thy sisters, so thy wretchedness is past compare,
For Oh! to see the altar-steps that holy men have trod,
The chiseled marble erst a spire pure pointing up to God,
The groined arch once thrilling to Euterpe's silver tones,
The bench which Themis' terror made the kingliest of
thrones,

The hearthstone, jewel of the home, the core of fire and food,
All, all inextricable prey of keen vicissitude,
All warped from kindly human use of pleasure and of gain,
A corpse unburied, festering beneath the sun and rain!

O hillside, gentle hillside! Ere America began
To be a nation merrily the fleet red children ran
Athwart thy grassy gilded slopes, or lay in placid rest
Sucking new sustenance from thee, the Mother's generous
breast,

And in this languid later day we too, yes, even we,
Poor fainting atoms, oft have drawn Antæus-like from thee
New strength, a moment's fleeting joy, a faith to feel again
That He who fashioned thee so fair hath also fashioned
men,

And that, O everlasting hill! long as thyself should stand
Secure, so also men were safe in the hollow of His hand,—
But now, the horror! Red and rent art thou from base to
crown,

Thy scarped crags and mossy dells alike have hurtled down,
And things unnamed and slimy, things that Nature hath
forbid

To seek the light, creep blindly out from secret crypts long
hid,

Unlovely noisome efts and newts and sad bewildered
gnomes,

Lamenting with a giant's woe their little ravished homes,
And tiny turbid rills steal forth and brownly to the plain
Run sobbing, striving with their tears to wash away the
stain,—

O high sweet hill! thou noblest type of beauty and of force,
Alas! that thou shouldst bar in vain the dread volcanic
course

Of—No, there is no name befits that dark mysterious Power
Which we call Fate when brokenly beneath its wheels we
cower,

And when beyond the belching clouds our trembling hearts
can trace

Only a lifted angry hand and thunderous dim face,—
'Tis otherwise we name that Power when harpstrings pulse
and play

For us, when for our eager hearts bloometh the rose of
May,

When joy enfolds us, when a soul springs in the worthless
clod,—

Ah, then in happy reverence we name that Power—God!

And yet, O city devastate, O great dishonored queen,
A lucent lake shall lap at last thy limbs in turquoise sheen,
And thou, O mountain gashed and gored, but patiently
await

Time's touch and thou shalt be adorned as a bride is for
her mate,—

But when a living soul endures such agony as this,
When in life's smiling rosy path there yawns a black abyss,
And when the whole fair fabric hath been seethed in roar-
ing flame

And earthquake terrors, pangs of hell and merited foul
shame,

What vine shall deck the framework gaunt, what clinging
tender moss

Shall hide the desolation and veil o'er the scar and loss,
And whence shall flow the cleansing wave, the healing in-
land sea

'Neath whose blue joy the hideous past shall sweetly
shrouded be?

II

II.

SEA and land were one gigantic flower,
Lying not at rest
On Tellus' tawny breast,
But palpitantly thrilling to the power
Of hidden fires that ever outward pressed,—
Pansy purple gloomed the far horizon,
Nearer billows grew
Myosotis blue,
A million dancing sparkles did bedizen
The liquid petals as with morning dew,—
Stamen-slim and white the waves were crisping.
All along the beach
In a yearning reach,
And ever was their innocent low lisp
As are rose-reveries folded each in each,—
All the sand was but as pollen golden,
Mealy, warm and sweet,
Seeming as it beat
Heartlike, as within its grains were holden
Vivifying pulse and fructuant heat,—
Tangled juniper and cooling mosses
Fringed the sea-bloom's rim,—
Hemlocks giant-grim
And stark cedar's graveyard shafts and crosses
Girt the flower with eboned greenness dim,—
And O! the tribute free and aromatic
These loyal vassals fling
To their sun and king!—
Never comes a moment so ecstatic
As first breath of balsam in the spring.

Listen, mortal! Thou shalt learn for asking
 Silent secret way
 Thou mayst make assay
Of thy soul's estate: Lie idly basking
 Near the pines some golden summer day,
Where thou hast a season put behind thee
 Life and all its jars,
 Where the branchy bars
Shake the scent from needle tufts that mind thee
 Of the scarcely finer thistle stars,
Where the little laughing waves are curling
 Flakily and sweet
 To thy tired feet,
Salt and strength and sun commingled, swirling
 Round the brain where baffled currents meet,—
If thou findest not then renewing, healing,
 Joy of balm and brine,
 Vigor as of wine,
Foes too long thy forces have been stealing,—
 Thou'rt already dead as Wallenstein!

Even such assay as this was making
 On a glowing day
 Midst of merry May,
For the waves on Barham Beach were breaking
 At the feet of one who listless lay,
Unto whom the sapphire sea was leaden,
 Sodden as with tears,
 Gray with heavy years,
Whose sick heart beat loud enough to deaden
 All the mirth and music of the spheres;
Vain it seemed, great Nature's kind assuaging,—
 Wearily she smiled

On a little child
 Who 'gainst self a mimic war was waging
 From the forts and castles he had piled,—
 Bitterly she smiled, ironic musing
 How herself had planned
 Citadels of sand,—
 Gloried in their snowy height, refusing
 Credence of the precipice they spanned,—
 Ah, she saw too surely now how fleeting,
 Insubstantial, vain,
 Frostwork on the pane,
 All her joy had been, mere toys, mere cheating,
 False mirage of vapid heart and brain,—
 Life, the fairy, feigned to love, and gave her
 Treasures manifold,
 Gifts of seeming gold,—
 Now she saw how brittle was the favor,—
 Sad sere leaves were all she had to hold.

Presently the boy, of pastime tiring,
 And of war's mishap,
 Crept into her lap,—
 Languidly she hushed the child, desiring
 Not to rend the silence' silken wrap;
 Yet she sang at last—it was her duty—
 All she lived for now—
 Just the learning how
 Shallops sail when fathoms deep is Beauty,
 Pleasure's lying slaughtered in the prow,—
 Slow she sang a song of April's weaving,
 Sang it softly o'er
 Since its burden bore
 Somewhat of her anguish in perceiving
 June was gliding onward as of yore.



III

III.

JUNE is coming,—O, she's coming! I glimpse upon the
hill
The flutter of her rosy robes, I hear the rapture-rill
That bubbles from her laughing lips, I breathe the bloomy
air
The happy breeze hath stolen from her tangled amber hair.

Oh, hasten, hasten, some of you! go forth and lead her
round,—
Let her not come this way and see the blood upon the
ground,
Let not her fleckless dew-drenched feet, all violet-dripping,
run
Across this black polluted spot where murder hath been
done!
It is not fit that we should meet,—I could not bear her eyes,
Wherein the joyous tenderness would film with sad sur-
prise
And wistful sorry questioning if I were verily
The same who hitherto hath shared her innocence and glee!

IV

IV.

BLUE-EYED the boy was,—scarcely had he spanned

More years than dimpled Cupid doth possess,
Almost a baby's was the tiny hand

Laid on his mother's neck in soft caress;
Vale-lilies are not purer than the shell

That cradled the fresh spirit yet more fair,
Meet spirit young cherubic choirs to swell

That sing above us in diviner air,—
Ah, the faint blush of morning on the cheek,

The rings of misty gold upon the brow,
The bloom ineffable, the tints that speak

Sadly of what we had but have not now,—
Yea, twice have we possessed, to have and hold

A few fleet years, this infantine sweet grace,
In our own substance first, the cloudy gold

Of curls, the snow and peach-bloom in the face;
Our selves were nested once, safe, safe from harm,

Changing, but waking joy for dreams of bliss,
Our world a tender breast and cradling arm,

Our heaven a laughing sweet Madonna-kiss;
There is no visage scarred with miser-age,

Foul with excesses, sodden-sour with wine,
That was not once a fair unsullied page,

Meet tablature for gravings high and fine,—
Hast spoiled the canvas, painter? hast awry

The marble dinted, sculptor? blurred the white
Pure vellum, scribe? Alas, 'tis vain to try

Retouching that which God could not make right!

This beauty of the youngeyed cherubim

A second time was ours, to be caressed,
Nursed, all but worshipped, in the distance dim
When Love and God on earth were manifest,—
Not stranger, deeper, was the awe and pride
Pygmalion felt when first the senseless stone
Glowing with intellect, soul-glorified,
Breathed, moved, and lived, his own, his blessed own!—
Than what we feel that hour a solemn voice,
Cleaving the wilderness of fang and thorn,
Bids, organ-deep yet clarion-clear, “Rejoice!
Carol, for unto you a son is born!”

Yet for mine own part, scarce an earthly sight
So wrings my heart, so fills it with despair,
With sad blind wanderings in a moonless night,
As doth a baby, Bethlehem-pure and fair;
Often I gaze and coldly turn away,
Forcing the tears back, smothering a sigh,
Only to hear the youthful mother say,
“She loves not little ones,—I wonder why?”
Ah me! Rather I love them overmuch!
Love sharpens so mine eyes I see beyond
The golden present, see the fated touch,
The black defiling stroke of evil’s wand,
See grinning Death inevitably wile
The babe into his oozy loathsome den,—
And after that how shall a woman smile,
Or ever quite trust God in heaven again?—
Or if the child shall live I see the years
Approach when she who now is queen shall sink
Dethroned and crownless, and her Marah-tears
Shall vital be to her as food and drink,—
Or if these three dark Furies spare to smite—

Vice, Death, Estrangement—some ancestral strain
 Shall haply breed anew, and burn and bite,
 Curdling and whipping into froth the brain.

Yet I, perchance, Iago-like, may be
 Too critical; our wretched planet shows
 No picture after all, so fair to see
 As this twined loveliness of bud and rose,—
 And even I must grant a thrill of joy
 Wavers across my heart like mountain breeze
 Merely to contemplate the sleeping boy
 Rosily couched upon his mother's knees,
 And that young mother in her beauty's flower,
 An artist's idol, fancy-stellified,
 E'en such a being as the gods should dower
 With all of earth's and heaven's good allied.

Yet such a pair do presuppose a third,—
 A child and mother form not a duet,
 But mere component trio-parts, unheard,
 Unknown, save when in triple sonance met,—
 Where then was he, the master and the king,
 The chief musician, he should complete
 The harmony, and make the pinewoods ring
 Unto the trembling of their lutestrings sweet?
 Why did the boy, half rousing in his sleep,
 Soft iterate his father's name in vain?
 Why did her face so work in anguish deep
 That blood, not tears, had best expressed her pain?
 Why did he linger? Sure he must have felt
 Their need, and felt the luring golden day,—
 Alas! their king in cringing horror dwelt,
 Shackled, dishonored, clad in felon's gray!

v

V.

WHEN simple maid or stately matron, Dowsabel or
Dame,

Queen gold and ermine wrapped or but a sluttish
kitchen quean,

Doth step from virtue's pedestal into the slough of shame,
Filling the hearts that loved her with hot rage or
anguish keen,

There mingles never in that grief the sad strange element
Of disbelief and doubt and wild incredulous surprise,
'Tis only as if in a storm a lily sidewise bent,

Not that a radiant angel's grace hath fallen from the
skies;

A woman hath one way to sin, one only and no more,—

A fragile creature mothlike made for pleasure and for
love,

She dares not waste upon the rocks, the bleak and barren
shore,

Her little gilded sunlit hour, but reckless soars above
To flutter for a moment where the fire-red poppies flaunt,

Where soon the filmy wings are scorched, the tiny feet
are seared,

The sunshine fades, the garden fills with grisly shapes and
gaunt,

And punishment looms darklier than ignorance hath
feared,—

Poor broken butterfly! our hearts have ached full many a
time

To see thy gauzy pinions crushed or fury-fouled with slime,
But never to a woman's fall is paid the praise that lies—
The compliment, the tribute high—in honest shocked sur-
prise.

But as Louise sat lost in thought, and from her loosened
clasp

Let the child settle to the sand in deep and deeper sleep,
And let fierce Recollection's fearsome fleshless hand un-
hasp

Pandora's box where horrid thoughts did dart and
crawl and creep,—

Oh, to Louise it seemed the worst wild imp of all the
horde—

The blackest bottom drop of sweltered venom—e'en
was this,

The wonder, the amaze that he, her master and her lord,

Who years ago had sealed her his with a long lover's
kiss,

That he, even he whom she had sworn to honor as her Head,
Who seemed in sooth a hero girt with lightnings high and
dread,

Her sovereign, prince, director, next to very God indeed,
Was an ignoble mongrel cur of a detested breed!

'Tis pitiful when desperate and faint a man will clutch

At bread or fruit or food's equivalent, a bit of gold;

We pardon the white wretch's crime, for Nature will do
much

To keep the soul embodied and the starving body
souled;

But when for mere externals, luxuries and baubles vain,

For the vile froth and spittle of the sick inglorious time,

For refuse which philosophers and poets but disdain,

When for this outward scum of life a man in filth and
grime

Doth steep himself, what single palliation may be made?

That right is right and wrong is wrong we surely know;
but yet,

Less harmful doth it seem to all, less must the soul degrade
To filch an orange just to soothe a baby's fever-fret
Than to break faith with thousands, to betray a city's trust,
To scorn the ditcher's sweated hoard and scatter it like dust,
To turn the helpless old from home, to make the dying
 weep,
To strip the children, sending them to cold and hungry
 sleep,
To squander on one Roman night the gold a youth had
 saved
To tide him o'er the gleaning years of thought his spirit
 craved,
And a maiden's shield 'gainst poverty insanelly down to
 beat,
Careless that she for refuge must seek either stream or
 street.

The little silver fortresses these trusting souls had built,
And given to the keeping of a seeming honest hand,
Had crumbled, tottered to their fall upon the shifting silt,
Founded, alas! not on a rock, but in the treacherous
 sand.

Thief - liar - robber - cheat!—The wife felt all her senses
 swim
E'en as the words, familiar grown, did shape them-
 selves once more;
There surged within the syllables a horror vast and grim
Which the gorge rose at, while the eyes with salt sick
 tears brimmed o'er.

She could remember how her life, smooth, soft, had come
to be

Still smoother, softer, from the faintest smirch or shadow
free,—

She could remember wondering how Lance had dared to buy
Such diamonds to gem her hands as stars the wintry sky,—
Then had come rumors—how she fought those dragon
rumors down!—

That toadlike swelled and winked and leered, and leaped
across the town,

Rumors of other diamonds starring false white alien hands,
And of a merry game that's played with loose-leaved rosy
bands,

Not with strict Hymen's narrow cirque of virgin gold, a
game

Of mad extravagance that ends in black cyclonic shame,—
Then like a thunderclap the journals launched their javelins
On Lance's life and dragged to light a hundred hiding sins,
And he was hated! hated so that even in the street
Upon herself and little child deep imprecations beat
From men that he had beggared, and she heard them sneer-
ing say

“Look at the seal and velvet garb for which our earnings
pay!” —

Then the slow process of the law, the feints, evasions, fears,
The verdict, “Guilty!” the sharp stroke of doom, “For
twenty years!”

Then the crowd's jubilance quick-stilled, the low approving
note,

Then a gray fog that chilled her heart, a climbing in her
throat,

Her husband's bending, anguished face, wild-eyed, with
ashen cheeks,—

Then, merciful oblivion for long, long lctosed weeks.

VI

VI.

IT was eve,—'twas the hour when the Angelus, ringing
Soft o'er the streamlets and low o'er the leas,
Sang of rest to the weary earth, censerlike swinging
Palpitant blessing and balm on the breeze,—
Sweetly it chimed over Barham Beach, bringing
Peace for a moment to stricken Louise.

'Gainst a pale yellow sunset she stood, careless leaning
Where rustic and lichened a gate barred the way,
And on either hand pine trees were black damascening
The western expanse primrose golden and gay,—
Ebon black was her robe, but great poppies went straying
Golden, magnificent, over its sheen,
Dark as midnight her hair gloomed, and ringlets were play-
ing

Round the gold comb like the crest of a queen,
And the black of her eyes was what one in the gloaming
Sees in a fern-feathered wood-fountain's deep,
A black where yet late little glints go a-roaming
Ere night's nursing tenderness rocks them to sleep,
And so staglike the lift of her head was, so stately
The fearless straight glance and her whole haughty
grace,
One had met her with homage, nor deemed that but lately
She had writhed in the modern rack's iron embrace.

There are seasons when nulled is all power of sensation,
When spirit and substance have fretted so long
Frayed out for the nonce are alike indignation,
Grief, horror, and hope, and the sting of shame's thong,

And the weary sad soul saith "At last it is over,—
Now I shall rest, since I never again
Of rapture shall sip as the bee of the clover,
Nor smothering sink in the mire of the fen!"

If ever, O mortal, thou finds't thyself riven
Of that which hath hitherto made up thy life,
If destiny hath like a hurricane driven
To shreds all the projects with which thou wert rife,
If fainting, disheartened past weeping, thou carest
Not to crawl on o'er the desolate land,
Fear not! God is merciful! haply the fairest
Dayspring and dream of thy life is at hand!

So Louise, as she stood with the sunset gold-crowning
All her sweet womanhood there by the gate,
Forgot for the moment the strangling and drowning,
Felt her soul emptied of love and of hate,—
They were utterly gone, she felt, even departed,
As were the gossamer seeds of last year,—
What should come later, then? what if there started
Grain for an aftermath precious and dear?
What if she learned to live nobly? — grew braver,
Reached up to God past the low loves of earth?
Could a woman do this, as a man can, and save her
Soul from hell-fire as a brand from the hearth?

Nay, for the difference, deep, everlasting,
As of old 'twixt the sexes abideth today,
Not to be altered by fuming or fasting,—
O ranters! cease striving to prate it away!
Man is to himself self-sufficing, sustaining,
Lord of the empire of will and of mind,

Needing no womanly aid, half disdaining
The rapture that but in her arms he can find,—
If noble, then noble because of inhering
Faculty, calling, election divine,
If wicked, no feminine foe can come leering
“This poor devil’s fall’s an achievement of mine!”
No, never! for man to himself standeth, falleth,
Trembles at no human governor’s nod,
Weeps alone and grows strong; and, praying, he calleth,
None intervening, himself upon God.

While for us: Men are marble, and we are but mastic,
Things to be malaxed like wax or like gold,—
A woman is good or bad just as the plastic
Soft clay of her nature curves under man’s mould,—
Full apt of impressure is woman, a creature
Made to receive much and little to give,
A copyist faithful, a learner, no teacher,
A crypt for love’s logic, for aught else a sieve,
Who can know but few things, and these scarce worth the
knowing,
Who e’er since the age prehistoric began
Hath donned her pontificals just for the throwing
Idolatrous incense and worship to man,—
Worship, forsooth! it is God we should duly
Adore, and not man; but this one is the worst
Of our foibles,—that woman ne’er worships God truly
Unless the low human love faileth her first!

Yet e’en as a woodbine whose oak, thunder-cloven,
Lies blackened and perishing, prone in the wood,
Strives up, struggles out from the ruin inwoven,
And helplessly reaches toward aught that withstood

The shock of the tempest, so woman, heart-broken,
Longs for a brotherly clasp of her hand,—
Not God, Oh, not God! merely one who has spoken
With Him, who but echoes His utterance grand;
So 'twas well for Louise, in this first dim uplifting
Of sad darkened eyes to the Power out of sight,
This first feeble touch to the rudder, this drifting
Rather by chance than intent toward the right,
That a messenger onward came riding, slow rifting
Straight through the aureate vistas of light.

Onward he musingly rode, scarcely seeming
To note if his steed were a laggard or swift,
As a victor-knight rides from a tourney, soft dreaming
Over the beautiful Queen and her gift,
With his gaze on the Occident, glowing, Elysian,
Where forge-fumes of Titan deep-glorious rolled,
Till sudden he saw her, a wonder, a vision,
All in her panoply sable and gold.

'Tis not often a man in his first careless glancing
Flung to a never seen feminine face
Findeth not only a hundred charms dancing,
Fluttering, faylike, around her sweet grace,
Findeth not only all this but perceiveth
That even already the womanly heart
Hath discerned of his need, and that need swift relieveth,
Sisterly tender, not cloistered apart
In austere chilly depths of reserve; but this rider,
Traversing slowly the pebble paved sand,
Saw that this lady when first he espied her
Served like the lowliest lass in the land,
For her delicate fingers were silently swinging

The great stubborn gate that divided the lane,
So he might pass, if he chose, without springing
Down from his horse to rive padlock and chain,—
And 'twas much that her face where the sun's strong reflection

Singled no blemish 'gainst honor and truth
Was proud with its high haughty sense of perfection,
And rich with the corals and contours of youth,
But 'twas more that she helpfully thought of him,—sweetly
Had watched him advance ere he looked in her eyes,
More, that she toiled for him, faithfully, featly,
E'en such a space as a meteor flies,
And courteous he thanked her, his sentences ringing
Resonant, masterful on the soft air,
Then carelessly down from his handsome horse flinging,
Took from her fingers their seneschal's care,
And then he stood smiling, bareheaded, calm pleading
Community e'en as of mariners wrecked,
Since strange astral forces their feet had been leading
Till they should here at earth's end intersect,—
Yes, he smiled, and Louise thought 'twas something worth
living

For, merely the seeing and sharing that smile,
Deemed him blest among men, since he might go on giving
Such "Benedicites" mile after mile
All along the dark road to the meanest of creatures,—
How the clear spirit flashed lucently through
The pale porcelain lamp of the cameo features,
Cyclamen perfect, of ivory's hue!

Yes, he smiled, and remounted, and onward went riding,
Turning to wave ere he passed out of sight,
And the woman stood long while the shadows came gliding,

Smoothing the way for the dark sultan, Night,
Stood alone 'neath the murmurous pines, yet not lonely,
Nor burdened and banned with her memories vile,
For present and past in one consciousness only
Were fused, a strange marvelous dream of a smile!

VII

VII.

AND the dream lingered still when the gibbous red arc
Of the slow lagging moon cleft the resinous dark
And shone o'er the sea as a crimson-soaked path
Fierce fire-darting Odin had traversed in wrath,—
Lingered still when the faint silver spangles and few
That earliest peeped in the tremulous blue
Had married and multiplied, striven, grown strong,
And made all the firmament glad with their song,—
Lingered still when she sought the low humble abode
Where a light from the casement a warm welcome glowed,
Where the creepers were garlanding window and wall,
And a willow drooped lovingly down over all,—
And the dream tangled deep in the mesh of her hair,
And merged when she knelt in the words of her prayer,
And when by her baby's she pillowed her head
To a vision of sleep was the waking dream wed.

She was lying, she thought, where the weltering wave
Rolled ravenous up to the mouth of a cave,
The sand at its portal all trampled, strown thick
With dark clammy drops at whose touch she turned sick,
Its depths coldly bright with the semblance of stones,—
Ah God! 'tis a face — no, a skull — they are bones!
And she wist not how ever she came in that place,
For scarce could a chamois or eagle find space
On the cliff that rose ominous, beetling and scarred,
Snarlingly keeping invincible guard,—
And her robe was the poppied black, golden of brede,
Heavy with wave-wash, and filed with gray weed.

And sudden the wind set its teeth with a gnash,
And the cheek of the sea whitened under its lash,
And a murderous mist wrapped the sun in a shroud
And stifled his struggles in cloud upon cloud,
And the gulls fled afraid in the gloom; yet the light
Abiding too clearly, too plain showed the sight
That uprose, was belched out of the shuddering wave
As frantic an earthquake might fling from a grave
Pollution made visible, flesh-fretted jaws,
Bared fangs, eyeless sockets, white tigerish claws,
With a vast cruel strength to consume and despoil,
And a horror unnamed in its serpentine coil,
And she screamed and God heard her, for lo! on the height,
Majestic, self-shedding a glory of light,
Stood Michael the Saint! And he shouted on high
And stripped off the veils from the sun in the sky,
And the scales of his armor were glittering gold,
Dazzling and splendid, superb to behold,
And his crescent curved pinions were snowily pure,
Full strong to uplift, to aspire, to endure,
And he plunged to her rescue,—swift, headlong, he came,
And the wind of his wings was as rushing of flame,
And the sapphirine flash of his terrible eye
Was as lightning that riveth the blue summer sky,—
And his sword circled over, and deadly it fell,
And she heard a calm summons: “Look up,—all is well!”
And he stood, a serene lofty light on his brow,
And she was transformed, though all ignorant how,
For she saw that her ruined robe glimmered to white,
And that even as he golden-fair in her sight
Stood peerless, her body and spirit had grown
Beautiful, radiant, matching his own,
And she said, “O my hero triumphant and true,

O savior, hath God made me like unto you?
Are we brother and sister, then, master and child?—"'
And he bent over her, bent down and smiled!

And she woke. It was dawn; the child feebly had cried,
And its moan had mixed close with the moan of the tide,—
'Twas a ghastly gray morning,—a ghost-fingered rain
Wailed and despaired and beat wild at the pane,—
And she soon hushed the child; but the heart-broken sea
Sighed huskily on, "Not to be,—not to be!"

VIII

VIII.

BESIDE the silver sea they sat at eve,
Bathed in a pale sweet amethystine glow,
Watching the billows' languorous slow heave,—
When sank the sun that did not find them so?
Calypso and Ulysses in their isle,
Lone rocky coign amid the howling main,
Not more depended on each other's smile
For human comradeship than did these twain,—
Mornings they paced for hours the firm brown marge,
Salt-sprinkled, shelly, flecked with crimson weed,
Deep, deep immersed in thought, discoursing large
Of rampant evil and of mortal need;
Noontides they sought the dim and bosky wood
Where vines laced intricately overhead,
And there some rhyme of regal womanhood,
Some tale of knightly quest alternate read;
Often they lingered on the wheatfield's brink,
And heard the scythe-blades' merry carillon,
And quaffed each other's health in harvest-drink,
And cheered the beaded brown armed reapers on;
And oft they marked the melting pearly sails
Slow drifting on athwart the purple sea,
And dreamed what cassia sweetness, silken bales,
What Asian riches might the cargoes be;
And when delayingly they homeward went,
'Neath the keen stars and silver-sifting moon,
Flute-like and organ-like their voices blent
In "You'll Remember!" or in "Bonnie Doon,"—
And if the night were dark, and veiled the way,
Close clung her fingers to his thrilling arm,

And slowly, slowly did their footsteps stray,
Loth to conclude such foolish sweet alarm,—
And once at parting he had said “Goodnight,—
How brave am I, that bitter word to say!”
And she breathed low, “O friend, the new-found light
I have from thee turneth the night to day!”

They sat, this balmy eve of late July,
While the deep dyes that tintured all the West,
Gold-grailing opulent the ruby sky,
Grew the dark iris of a wood-dove’s breast,
Soft fading to a sea-gull’s silver gray,
And these sweet silent changes seemed to plead
That the rapt watchers, solemn-still as they,
Should hold from any trivial word or deed.

Light failed; the lustrous pageantry was o’er,
Yet still Louise sat moveless, lost in thought,
And flinging off the stillness, Theodore
Asked of the broideries her brain had wrought.

But she, ashamed,—since all her thought had been
But of an old world woven rune of love,
Of Guinevere and all her splendid sin,
The baseness and the brilliancy thereof,
And of the question whether it were best
For lily maids to fade in virgin bud,
No leaping heart-throbs ripening the breast,
No rosy ardors reddening the blood,
Or happier to blossom as a rose,
A laughing rose and joyous in the sun,
That liberal and golden-hearted throws
Abroad the sweets that it of Fate hath won,—

Whether 'twere best to love once — not at all—
Or twice indeed — Could then a woman twice
Be born? could she that spring of youth recall,
Again the boy-god's careless aim entice?

But sore ashamed of all these musings fond,
Louise revealed them not to Theodore,
Knowing how steadfastly he winged beyond
Faint worn refrains that self for burden bore,
And she but answered, "Asked you what I thought?
Ah, thought's a process from which women shrink,—
We harbor tinselled visions fancy-fraught,
But never does a woman truly think!—
'Tis otherwise, you know, O friend, with men,
Whose minds may sink or soar with steady sweep,—
Tell me your shallowest slight impulse, then,—
It hath more value than my inmost deep!"

"Ever self-wronging? — But my thought was this:
How the great cities, and that proudest one
Of all, into whose seething foul abyss
I hurl myself like Rome's sublimest son,
How they descend and pause upon the verge
Of this same sea, this salty cleansing brine,
That beats forever with its mighty surge,
Shouting of victory and strength divine,—
And Oh! I asked from out my weary soul
If everlasting God could find no force
To turn into each vermin-haunted hole
This awful current's purifying course,
Besoming out the million oozy things
Quick breeding in each loathly noisome den,
Ancient corruptions and old ulcer-stings,

And all that burrows in the flesh of men,—
Is there no way, O God, to wash and sweep
The crusted filth that festers to gangrene,
To loose my city's limbs from sottish sleep,—
No way to cleanse and cure that fallen queen?"

Then he fell silent, and the woman fixt
Far on the sea-rim dry indignant eyes,
Burning with shame to think her life had mixt
With one who held that city otherwise,
Taught her fresh harlotries, ignored her pain,
Low as he found her left her trebly worse,
Sluiced deep into one sound gold-bleeding vein,
Became the chief incarnate civic curse,—
Thank God, he should be punished! Years on years
Had he to languish in his darkened cell,
Beset with red remorse, with leopard fears
Lest dogging vengeance send him thence to hell,—
Ah, Ah! Far keeper, see the ankle-chain
Bites deep and deeper, even to the bone,—
Smite thou the lips into a crimson stain
That laughed until the universal groan,—
And let him labor! Let the wax defile,
The tough thread cut those lily hands and sweet,—
Teach him to sweat, slow fashioning the while
The poor coarse garb for honest humble feet!

Yet ah! as Time should slowly onward creep,
Chastised should crime be, evils righted,—yes!
The cheated folk once more their gold should heap,
But she, the wife, had hope of no redress,—
What had he made of her he dared to wed?
A puppet to display his thievish gains!

Her very frame was formed of stolen bread,
Dishonorable blood slunk through her veins!—
How he had slighted her, poor fretting fool,
How merely tolerated her caress,
Flying, as doth a lad let out of school,
To find elsewhere his real happiness,—
And Oh, her soul, that was as maiden snow
Ere he had smirched it with his sooty own,
Now in the muddy ditch was lying low,
Its pristine lofty clarity o'erthrown;
She had no yearning for the things of God,
Nor could with noble aspirations mate,
Cared not to tread the paths that saints have trod,
Bankrupt of love, but Midas-rich in hate;
What had her life been since that awful time?
Had she not deigned to profit by his sin,
Nor striven from the moral slough to climb,
The filthy stew he flung and left her in,—
Were there not sparkling now upon her hands
Diamonds that were as sweat and tears congealed,
And angry emerald eyes of pauper bands,
Rubies, red drops from wounded hearts unhealed?
Had she not praised the juggling skillful swords
That clashed for her in later legal theft,
Owned she not even now bright secret hoards
Whereof no earthly power could leave her reft?
That was her soul, then! such a rotten thing
As carrion breeds, at which the gorge doth swell,
A worm, an eyeless maggot—what the king
Of all the lost would scorn to house in hell!

She rose in silence, silent slipped away
Through the sea-shadows and their salt perfume,

Weak-pitiful her body seemed to sway,
And Theodore swift followed through the gloom,—
“Not going, friend?” — “Yes, going, and alone,—
I heard a voice that loud and louder grew,
Till now it roareth to a thunder-tone,
Swearing I am not fit to bide with you,—
Oh, Theodore, my soul is sick with hate—
Hate of that one who taught me how to love—
Hate of my child — his child! on whom a weight
Hangs leaden-heavy,—hate all else above
Of this *myself*, this wretched mongrel I,
Who have blushed only at mine outward shame,
But now self-judged and damned am like to die,
Transfixt by cruel conscience’ mortal aim!”

But Theodore clasped brotherly her hands,
And soothing strove to guide her toward the light,
Long pacing to and fro the quiet sands,
While the Great Wain slow rumbled out of sight,
And ever as she blamed her darkened will,
And ever as she said “Let be — let be!
I am not worth thy pains!” he answered still,
“I have helped others, shall I not help thee?”

And when she left him, long he strolling mused
On the mysterious dim ways of Fate,
Who had his weary wonted tasks refused,
Decreed the fierce loud stress of toil should 'bate,
Just for this summer, just the special hour
When this one woman had such deadly need
Of counsel, when with archangelic power
He for her fighting soul might intercede,—
According to the turning of the scales,

She should go biased forth for wrong or right,
Henceforth a creature of miasma-dales,
Or dwelling with proud eagles on the height, —
She should go forth a potion-brewing witch,
Cankered and soured, a thing of spite and sneers,
Meet for light loves and envy's eating itch,
Sowing dissension broadcast down the years, —
Or else she should go forth a gracious queen,
Noble as fair, most perfectly controlled
To high clear purposes, whose calm serene
White brow should be with sweetness aureoled,
A woman to whose lips inspiring speech
Should be germane as odor to the rose,
Whose tender smile should its recipients teach
Something of warm soft love the nestling knows,
Who should account it privilege to give
Her life to hush her fellow creatures' cry,
Helping besotted misery to live,
And helping it, forespent and faint, to die.

And did this awful chance of life and death
Lie truly in his hand to make or mar?
He bared his head, and drew a solemn breath,
And upward looked, where star on shining star
The mighty universe piled overhead,
And outward looked he, where the sullen deep
Uttered its menace fathomless and dread,
Rolling forever in resistless sweep,
And inward looked he, to his inmost heart,
That beat in poignant altruistic pain,
Seeming to be not of God's plan a part,
But even as it did the whole contain,
The height, the depth, to-come, and long-ago,

All silver spires of unimagined bliss,
All nadir-deeps, unplummeted, of woe,
The future's pinnacles, the past's abyss,
And of a sudden all these things were less
To Theodore, less the whole human race,
Than just to hear one nighted soul confess
"God is, and I dare meet Him face to face!"

IX.

NO minion of justice intrenched, no plutocrat's tool
was he,

Not one to cry out to the people "Be patient till Death
makes you free!"

No, for he knew that patience and prayer had centuries back
been outworn,

Lying spells that had worked no change in things monstrous
and not to be borne,—

No, for he blazed with the fury of love for his mocked and
downtrodden race,

And strenuous strove to bring it about, the second redemp-
tion's grace,—

No, for he laughed in his throat at the pitiful failure of
State,

Of Knowledge and Power and Church the national crimes
to abate,—

No, for he felt in his soul that the beautiful earth belonged
Just to the common people, befooled of it, cheated and
wronged,—

What! should he seal up his vision against the appalling
fact

That close to America's money centre lieth a hopeless tract
Of poverty all as degrading, as brutalizing to man
As ever rotted and stank upon earth since earth's existence
began,

That in cannonshot e'en of the slender spires and under the
golden domes

The poor are huddled to fester and faint in their fetid and
feverstruck homes,

That palaces gilded and floating and fine of multifold mil-
lionaires

Glide by the wharfrats starved, half-naked, and numb on
the water-stairs,
That near to a banquet Lucullian, rose-rich, where the wine
free floweth as rain,
'There be those who are drowning in charcoal fumes their
hunger and utterless pain.

Yes, other causes there possibly were; distantly had he
heard
Of efforts and zeal on trivial grounds, of cleaner pools
upstirred,
But for him there was only this one, nor could be, and all
of his life-blood ran
In one straight channel, a passionate force in the battle of
man against man,
Man with only his body 'gainst man with a godlike brain
And iron will and the habit of rule and his faculties keen in
train
To do his bidding, and over all this the power to have and
to hold
The master-key, to serve and be served by the national
deity, gold,—
Ah, the unequal conflict, the cruel preposterous odds!
On the one hand, wealth with its mocking laughter as of
Olympian gods,
Its arrogant calm supremacy, its level and dominant eye,
The master's glance that maketh the hound cringing and
whining to lie,—
On the other hand, man in the agony of the shelterless
Christ at the door,
Whose pitiful patient silence or whose clamorous deafening
roar

Alike were a cry that pierced its way deep into Theodore's
soul,
As a white-hot iron stinging and lashing him on to a definite
goal,—
A cry upswelling and fierce, a terrific stentorian demand
Of the workers for that wherein they have wrought, of the
laborers for the land,
A plea that the trampled millions at last be allowed to pro-
duce
The common things of which they have need for decent
advantage and use,—
A series of burning questions that go unanswered from year
to year,
That courts and pulpits and press unite in not seeming to
hear,
Yet questions that will not down: Why are the men who toil
To the garnering bountiful harvests losing their claim to the
soil?
Why from the strong to the weak are the taxes shifted and
flung,
The luxury of a handful out of the myriads wrung?
Why do the rich grow richer at every effortless leap,
And the poor sink down in the quagmire, lower and ever
more deep?
Why are men forced to idleness, their zealous ambition
stilled,
While e'en at the moment from overwork women and chil-
dren are killed?

No, Theodore felt that a man was not sent into this agonized
life
Merely to save his soul and creep out of the stress and the
strife,—

He would leave his soul and the saving thereof simply to
Him Who had made,
And fling himself body and spirit and mind into the desperate raid
On behalf of his wretched brothers, the dark disinherited mob,
And be one with them, of them and for them, till his heart's last passionate throb,—
Disinherited, yes,—of fortune, of happiness, country, repose,
Of liberty, even of life, all but life's shuddering throes,—
Dear Heaven! they suffer so cruelly, repudiated of God,
And left to the devilish mercy of the sweater's brine-pickled rod,—
They crawl to and fro on the pavement, the white-skinned shivering slaves,
Scarce seemlier than would corpses be, upraved from cholera-graves,
Yet, not, alas! the shades they look: Though pallid and anguish drenched,
Still are they flesh and blood, from which a profit may yet be wrenched!

It was no heathendom alien and far against which Theodore strove,
No priestly Druidical worship round altar-fires in a grove,
No Hindoo mother's sacrifice of blood of her very blood
And bone of her bone and life of her life to the Ganges' turbulent flood,
But ever he sought to rescue and reach and drag from the Juggernaut wheels
The bodies deformed and dwarfed and scarred with livid and ulcerous weals,

And watchful standing upon the brink of the ravenous
river of sin

Often he held one woman's arm from pushing another in,
And often he saved from the cannibal throats of the hideous
mines of coal

The tender and innocent children, or snatched from a stoking
hole

Some creature that scarce had force for thanks, that scarce
in fact seemed a man,

So long had it been since he freely breathed and upright
shouted and ran,—

Many there be who question today if such are indeed men
at all,

This race inferior whom we have robbed and crowded
against the wall,

With their simian foreheads, ophidian eyes, their tortive
and blackening souls,

And their weak, weak minds that visionless wane in lives
like a gallery mole's,—

Yes, they are men, by Heaven! and haply the time shall be
That latent leonine manhood shall rouse, shall strike off its
chains and be free,—

Some jar shall direct the prisoned force to one critical point;
and then!—

Though they seem to be devils let loose out of hell, at last
we shall know them for men!

But ever he raged at the futile force which is all that one
man can exert

And ever he passionate pleaded and eloquent sought to convert

Wealth from its present attitude of a tyrant selfish and
base,

A despot cruel and deaf and blind, usurping unlawful its
place,
To that which it should be, a factor tremendous to multiply
and increase
The sum of humanity's knowledge, its happiness, comfort
and peace;
Force should have Right for a master, impartial and calm
on its throne,
But alas! the ignorant force of the mob for a ruler hath
Plutus alone,
A Czar who deemeth the State's one function is merely to
smite and to scourge,
And to push back into the dungeon-deeps the victims who
long to emerge
And to prove the power of their citizenship, the spell of the
magical ring,
That might procure a radical change and make the populace
King,—
But, ah! with the country's eyes myopic, her vital energies
torn
By love of Mammon, contemptible struggles, or anesthetized
in scorn,
What hope for the peaceless millions, what succor was
drawing nigh
To the many, while as of old the few soared safe in a thun-
derless sky?
And ever he stirred with eternal protest, with indignation
divine,
With the old crusading fury and zeal, a frenzy heroic and
fine,
For the people!—He gave to the people his life and his
thought and his gold,

Longing to see in the service of Man the whole wide earth
 enrolled,
Longing to hasten the halcyon time when God shall esteem
 it good
To melt and fuse all hatred and greed in a golden brother-
 hood.

X

X.

NOT all unbroken was the summer's rest,—

Often had Theodore to haste away
Some exigent demand, some loud behest
Of wolf-encircled Labor to obey,
And one fair morning, waiting for the train
That was to bear him to a distant field
Where the one army, sipping its champagne,
Lounged till the other, sullen-starved, should yield,
He heard the quick sharp tap of little feet,
A soft robe's flutter, peach-bloom pink and thin,
And saw a woman's face all tender-sweet,
Yet with a new resolve and strength therein.

"Ah, yes! I know — I know we said goodbye"—

She breathed, her cheeks as rosy as her gown,
"Last night in darkness when but God was nigh,
But you today are passing through the town,
And will you stay an hour for Louise,
And will you seek them out, those master-men
Who fought for me, and will you give them these,
And say that I have need of help again,
All wrested gold and land to back restore,
All which they wrought so well to now undo,—
Oh, but they will be angry, Theodore!

'Tis much to ask that you should brave it through!
And here — this casket holds the jewel-things
In which I revelled, deeming they were mine,—
Yes, I shall miss them, chief my pretty rings,
But they must go, must elsewhere flame and shine,
Even the comb it pleases you to like,

Not for its golden semblature of lace,
Merely because the sunlight chanced to strike
On it the moment you first saw my face,—
Well, let them float like thistle seeds away,—
Whoever wears them, they are mine no more,—
'Tis the first timid step to brighter day,
The first to being liker Theodore!
And do not let this fret you, who must bend
All energy upon your mission high,—
God safely speed you through your duty, friend!
Here is the train, and so — goodbye! goodbye!"

Down swooped the dark enormous bird of prey,
Pantingly paused with ominous sharp hiss,—
There was but time some ten crisp words to say,
To change a long glance sweeter than a kiss,
Ere the great talons in their iron snare
Had snatched their quarry, ere the pinions spread,
Vulture-like cleaving through the shuddering air,
And the black terror swift had onward sped,—
And was it but the smoke-wreaths drifting high
That mournful veiled the regal August sun,
Or did some mystic grace that moment die
Out of the day, and leave its charm undone?

Louise walked slowly homeward to her child,
And by degrees the shadow passed away
From out the heavens, and a radiance mild,
A still soft happiness suffused the day,
For sweeter far than mere unthinking joy
It is that joy at peace to contemplate,
Free from emotions that consume and cloy,
From breathless blisses that must bliss abate,—

'Tis not that joy is not half joy without
Gray melancholy dashes on its rose,
Pangs separative, or the chill of doubt,
Or the sick sense that happiness must close,—
'Tis that in absence is a gracious balm,
A dovelike brooding of soft wings and warm,
A noontide rest, a blessed crystal calm,
More welcome than fair haven after storm,—
Love's actual presence is too strong a wine,
And rather would a woman steal away
To live in memory some hour divine
Than overlive it verily today.
I know not whether 'tis that fancy throws
A perfume o'er the lily, adds a hint
Of Arabic rich spice unto the rose,
Giveth refined gold new gilding's tint,
Or whether Love is such a tyrant-king
His very contact sears like lightning's flash,
His merest touch is as a scorpion's sting,
His glance a thing to shrink from like a lash,—
Certain it is, if you a woman ask
"What is the happiest hour you ever knew?"
She will but answer, "That's an easy task,—
'Twas a June day beside the dancing blue,
I sat alone, too present-blest to be
Mindful of rosy future, ruined past,—
Alone, alone! and whispered to the sea
That I was loved and that I loved at last!"

For Theodore — 'Tis the great Russian chief
Of thinkers who doth confident maintain
There's no such place for garnering a sheaf
Of rich ideas as a flying train,—

There's something in the mad terrific rush,
The hard hot grinding o'er the trembling steel,
That stimulates to sudden geyser-gush,
To swordplay keen or to a breathless reel,
Mysterious fibres, faculties inert,—
Wakes withered buds to splendid tropic flower.
Setteth inoperative minds alert,
And hath upon the heart a special power,
For in a love of which love is but half,
The other moiety unrest and doubt,
In the first hundred miles' elixir-quaff
Love waxes strong and doth his rivals rout,—
One sees that life's a journey, and its end
What satisfieth best the heart and brain,—
Witness that strongest love-scene ever penned,
Of Anna and Alexis in the train!

For Theodore — There were a thousand themes
Which his attention should of right engage,
Deep speculations, visionary schemes,
And closer grappling coil of work and wage,
Yet every gasp as of a terrified
Wild thing, each throb with which the wheels did seize
A rood of land and fling it to one side,
For him but sweetly syllabled "Louise!"

XI.

HOWEVER equably one may support
The first hours of an absence long or short,
Whatever glory-gleams may flash athwart
The gray, one longeth toward the close thereof
To end its blank, and like a weary dove
Fly to the home-nest and the arms of love,
And as the greedy train devoured each mile
Of the home journey, Theodore the while
Found his lips ever framing song or smile.

Wife-like she met him in the grassy road,
Unworn, with buttercups and daisies sowed,
Where the late scarlet shafts of sunset glowed,
And when they clasped each other's hands it seemed
A world more fair than ever poet dreamed,
Rosed with a light that from mid-heaven streamed.

The child was with her; it was strange to see
How, sweetly and unwittingly, the three
A perfect trinity had come to be,
Grouped in domestic union; for the boy
At sight of Theodore shrieked out for joy,
With baby clamors for a promised toy,
Which being given, down upon the grass
He flung himself, nor would he onward pass
Till he should all its hidden wealth amass,
And staying as his pleasure was, the twain
Sank on a little clover-studded plain,
Sweet as if Aphrodite there had lain.

“And have you missed me?” Theodore first said.

“Why should I miss you? when I daily read
Your doings, sayings, how your fortunes sped,—
Ah me! how wise you are, how strong, how free,—
With all the world before you where to flee,
Scarcely I thought you would return to me.”

“Louise! this absence was ordained to teach
Me that the world’s a ghost-world, out of reach,—
The living, breathing world’s at Barham Beach!”

“And did you do my bidding? Give the gold
Back to its winners?”

“Cerberus of old
Was not more raging-fearful to behold
Than they when first I did the matter break,
But valiant fought I for my lady’s sake,
And forced them down at last, and made them take
What you had sent,—all but one trifle vain
I previously had ventured to distraign,
Leaving in lieu thereof some golden grain,—
I could not have you utterly ungemmed,
You whom I fain would see pearl-diademmed,
Your vesture cloth of gold all turquoise-hemmed,—
Here, take it, mermaid, take your golden comb,—
How have you freed, down in your cool green home,
Your locks without it from the weeds and foam?”

She took it, and her eyes exultant flashed,
But instantly two bright drops downward splashed,—
A moment, then with tears soft laughter clashed.

There's special value in a gift far-fetched:
Full plain it shows the farer's fancy etched
Ever one image, though the long leagues stretched
Between: it is to say, "On such a street,
Where youth and beauty in proud concourse meet,
I saw them not, but thought of you, my sweet!"—
And even that high value is enhanced
When the donator, as this eve it chanced,
Is one whose life hath hitherto advanced
On loftier planes,—who hath not stooped to care
More for poor silly baubles brittle-fair
Than for the wee midge-wanderers of the air:
When women's gewgaws sudden seem concerns
Of import deep, when man indignant burns
To see a finger ringless, when he turns
From issues national, from treading mill
Of grinding need to remedy this ill,—
Why, that's a pretty tribute, if you will!

Gently she thanked him, then turned half away,
Finding it haply difficult to say
Somewhat she had rehearsed for half a day,—
At last she murmured, "Theodore! I too
Have a surprise, a little gift for you,—
Yet not a gift,—'tis only that I knew
You would be happy if tonight I said
All my malignancy at last was fled,
All hatred, all ignoble rancor, dead,—
I do forgive — if I should ever see
My husband — But O God! that must not be!—
I could accord forgiveness full and free!"

She turned to him her lovely face unflecked,

Child-eager waiting to be diamond-decked
With the praise-carcenet she did expect;
But deeming her forgiveness at the best
A maimed one, that too perfectly confessed
An arrow rankled yet within her breast,
The man was silent; yet he knew her mood
Had been a pit of black amaritude,
A marish whence black vapors did exude,
And surely she, who feebly had relumed
Her hope and faith where bitter darkness gloomed,
Deserved one word of cheer; but she resumed,
Swiftly, "You marvel, friend, how all alone
I have so generous, so forbearing grown,—
Ah, Theodore, this miracle's your own!—
For, sitting day-long by the ocean-brink,
Superimposing horrors back did shrink
To far white nothings, and I ceased to think
Of evil, and I reverently knew
That 'tis a fair pure world which cradles you,
And gradual gospels slowly pierced me through,—
'Tis fearful that he sinned — but yet — but yet—
Had he not sinned, we twain had never met,—
And so I do forgive him, and forget!"

Then Theodore extolled her, gave the meed
Of praise for which her soft black eyes did plead,
Full measure, heaping, running o'er indeed,—
Then ruthless snatched the youngster from his play,
On shoulder poised, and homeward led the way,
But ever to his honest heart did say,
"Could e'en a broken thing in convict-ranks,
Where Argus watches and the leg-chain clanks,
For such forgiveness render humble thanks?"

XII

XII.

WHEN soft the midnight brooded on the sea,
And the tired waves had sobbed themselves to sleep,
When wing nor leaflet stirred in any tree,
And the red honeysuckle ceased to creep,
When slumber folded all of Nature's sweet,
Save the intoxicant syringa-bloom,
That like a raptured heart ecstatic beat,
Pulsing and tremulous across the gloom,—
When fainter twinked the drowsy stars on high,
Sudden athwart the house all weary-still
Broke a hoarse whisper, swelling to a cry
Agonized, sharp,—“My child — my child is ill!”

Who does not know that piercing anguished tone,
Cutting the night serene like murderous steel,—
Who hath not questioned if his lintel-stone
Will blood-marked mercy or blank doom reveal?
Who hath himself not sickened as he woke
At the keen scourging of that outcry's rod,—
Who is so stubborn infidel he spoke
No frantic pleading to Almighty God?
Who hath not struggled 'twixt a prayer and curse,
Struck to the heart with sudden deadly chill,—
Who hath not deemed the utter universe
Mere chaff and refuse — since the child was ill?

One glance gave Theodore where poor Louise,
Hecuba-wild 'mid all her showered hair,
Sat with the writhing frame upon her knees,
That senseless gasped and clutched, and fought for air,

Then down the creaking stair ran Theodore,
Swift bridled, swiftly into saddle sprang,
And cannon-swift along the road he tore,
And loud the hoof-beats on the brook-bridge rang.

Then straightway did the kind house-people come,
A weatherbeaten venerable pair,
Striving to rouse the mother blind and dumb
From out her inarticulate despair,—
Lights flashed, and soon a kindled leaping fire
Made of good cheer ironic red pretense,
The water, in its liquid low desire
To save, soon bubbled mistily and dense,
And the good wife ran bustling to and fro,
Anxious, alert, endeavoring to prove
Homely appliances that might lay low
The fell besieger, stay his onward move,
And the man, eager too to help and serve,
Rude comforted the mother's wild alarms,
Telling how Theodore past creek and curve
Already swept, past hindrances and harms,—
And both the old hearts ached, less for this woe,
Less for the child and mother's reflex pain,
Than to recall a night of long ago,
When their poor skill was tried, and tried in vain.

And the boy struggled bravely for his life,
Fought hero-like throughout his soul's eclipse,—
Ah, God! 'tis like the turning of a knife
Within the breast to hear the purple lips
Unconscious strive a single word to frame,
"Mamma!" or "Papa!" as, if but 'twere said,
That broken, tender, talismanic name,

All the strange agony would straight be fled!

At last there came the jolt and jar of wheels,
The hearty footstep in the outer hall,
Then the bluff greeting, that itself half heals,
Encouraging, and making light of all,
And the old doctor in his stronger grasp
Took the convulsive clammy little shell,
And almost instantly a stiller gasp,
A softer eye proclaimed that all was well,—
Oh, to Louise it seemed that Christ again
Had left high heaven and its perfect rest
To walk once more the ways of wretched men,
And loving clasped her darling on His breast;
Yet too long had she been bereft of hope
Not still to quiver with the parted pang,—
In the dark prison-deeps she still did grope,
Nor wist that freedom's door wide open sprang,
And the fierce clamors that had long been pent
Within her breast now burst to whirling speech,
Where anguish past and sudden rapture blent
Confusedly, partaking each of each,—
“Oh, say not, say not there's no least, least chance!
It is not death, this sweat upon the brow?
Oh, Lance, our baby! Oh, where are you, Lance?
Surely you should be with us — with me now!—
And once I said I hated him, my child,—
You heard me, Theodore! But God above
Will never stoop to venge that falsehood wild
By snatching from me all I have to love!
And do you say that he is almost well,—
That he shall sleep and win from his repose
Such honey sweet as from the blue harebell

The brown bee wins, or from the Persian rose?—
How strange is all our living, Theodore!
Not till this hour have ever I been glad,
And now I surely know that nevermore
Aught upon earth hath power to make me sad!"

And then with sudden laughter, sweet and low,
Hands prest against her sweet heartshaken side,
She rising turned, but had not force to go,
Only that Theodore her steps did guide;
He led her to a couch and made her lie,—
Forespent was she with weary vanished grief,—
Made her recline, and promised to sit by,
Holding her hand, a mere wind-stricken leaf;
But ere she slept, half childishly she spoke
Haply some things were better left unsaid,
Reserve and dignity being quite down broke,
E'en as when standing by the coffined dead,—
"I'm sorry, Theodore, that I should call
For Lance, or any one, when you were near,—
I meant it not, for you are more than all
The world, my knight, my bucklered hero, dear,"—
Again: "Nor did I mean that desperate cry
That I had none to love but just my boy,—
I cannot sleep unshriven of that lie,
My spirit's gold clogged with such vile alloy,"—
Again: "Of course I never hated him,
My bud, my beautiful! but pity mixt
Defacingly with love till love grew dim,
Its calm completeness utterly unfixed;
The love that's pity-tarnished is a poor
Faint travesty of what love ought to be,
A tower of strength, steady, serene, and sure,

Something as lofty-high as God — or thee!"

Thereat she breathed "Goodnight!" then softly drooped
Sleep's downy wings and wrapped her deeply there,—
Then, nor until then, Theodore low stooped,
And with his lips scarce brushed her brow and hair.

XIII

XIII.

'T was a September midnight, and the train
Was flying through the earliest Autumn rain
That flashed in sportive laughter 'gainst the pane
Where Theodore leaned gazing, all his sight
Not of the eerie mirkness of the night,
But of an inward vision fairy-bright;
A winsome face was imaged in the blur,
And the wheels' eager strong vociferous whir
Was as a lyric madrigal of *her*;—
Once was a time when their incessant speech
Had goaded him to succor and to teach
The masses, blood-drained by a golden leech;—
Well, that should be again: The poet-king,
'Mid other thought-pearls thus did sweetly sing,
"There is and shall be time for everything,"—
And Theodore, who had unselfish ends
So long pursued 'mongst ingrates, traitor-friends,
And slanderbolts the modern Jove down sends,—
Sure he who had for galley slaves so toiled,
And had in sweat and brine his spirit moiled,
Sure he might hope to be of sin assoiled,
If for a space Dan Cupid, cunning mage,
Bewitched him into playing on a stage
To a fair queen the part of simple page
For one brief summer,—Hear me, you who read:
In our long-leisured heaven, where indeed
Chiefly shall vegetate, I fear, the weed
That rots on Lethe's wharf,—in heaven above,
Reviewing earth and all the years thereof,
We shall not grudge the instants spent in love!

He was no fool of petty hampering care
Of mere sense-comforts, whether foul or fair
The homeward path down which his course should bear,
And when the ringing shout of "Barham Beach"
Broke on the dream where palmtree, date, and peach
All greenly compassed him in poem-pleach,
Little he feared the elemental play,
But when the breathless train had rushed away,
Redeyed and angry, hungered for its prey,
He paused a moment 'neath the station-eave,
Amazed that so the wind did rend and reave,
The rain so spiteful seek to drench his sleeve,—
Yonder, he knew, lay distant, dimpled hills,
Nearer, the Barham woods white laced with rills,
Nearer than all, the ocean's thunder-thrills,
Yet not a soul in sight; he stood alone,—
Alone with God and storm; his love, his own,
Soft slept in peace—

A sudden timid tone:

"Eld-tortures rack his poor decrepit frame,—
Our host,—he could not drive, and so I came,—
But do not chide me, do not overblame"—

For answer, he but stifled all the rest
She would have spoken, crushed it in his breast,
And then as might a pilgrim thirst-possessed
Finding at unawares a little spring
Cool in the desert down his body fling,
Deep drinking, draughts all sweet and shuddering,
So Theodore impetuous kissed her lips,
Not as the fickle bee the gentian sips

A careless space, then to the aster slips,
But as one kisses who in vain hath sought
For half a life the idol of his thought,
And hath to her unwasted passion brought,—
And the white rain about them globed and grew
To a pearl-palace, and joy arrowed through
Alike the sense and spirit of the two.

XIV

XIV.

TWAS a gray morn—Alack and well-a-day!

Is not *the morning after* always gray?

Life is an upland where the shadows chase
Darkly the sun in everlasting race,
And the soft billows of clear beryl green
Turn to the black of prised tourmaline,
And if a moment golden grows the grain
Instant it sombres to a russet stain.

Still surged the ocean, though the wind had flown
To make in other lands its dreary moan;
The sand, whereon the rain so hard had beat,
Clogged brown and heavy round the hindered feet;
The scudding clouds frowned angerly and black,
Draping low heaven with their tattered rack,—
Often a gull's wing struck a snowy spark
Against the smothering and sullen dark,
Sad plained the curlew, and the awestruck waves
Mourned of an hundred new-made ocean graves.

Close to the sea, holding her robe away
From pool-pierced rocks, Louise alone did stray,—
Weary her eyes were, and her cheek was pale,
And her head drooped as if all force would fail,
And when her lover came along the strand
Not eager foot nor quick outstretching hand
Bade welcome, and he silent paused a space,
Seeking the riddle of her strained white face:
Not the maid's shyness nor the bride's soft bliss,
Wife's calm, nor any sweet of love was this,
But a dark plexure of new gain, new loss,

Hemlock and ivy round a martyr's cross;
Her face was as a stone; and Theodore
From very awe a little while forbore
To speak, but slipped her chilly fingers through
His arm, and slow her footsteps onward drew,—
Then, deep reproachful, suddenly out burst:
“Ah, ah, Louise! and is it thus you first
Accost me? Hath a puritan eclipse
Shrouded the smile that plays upon your lips
Like sunlit waves? Hath but the touch of mine
Sullied them so they may not flash and shine?
Were then my kisses like a living lash,—
Turned they upon your mouth to Sodom ash?”

She looked at him and faintly, whitely smiled,
Patient, superior, as at a child,—
“Whatever grieves me, Theodore, be sure
'Tis not those kisses passionate and pure,—
No, in this world of blackest sin and night,
Holy were they, divinely true and right,—
Oh, Theodore, my gift of God above,
Type to my weak, weak soul of strength and love,
At once archangel and a prince of men—
How if we may not ever kiss again?”

“Love mine, this was a thing that had to be,—
God sent us to each other by the sea;
You are no bounden wife: 'tis but to say
'Let the law set me free without delay,'—
Then the whole land shall know that you are mine, —
Ah, now at last your sweet lips smile and shine!”

“Yes, dearest,—haply you are right,— I know

Last night I deemed it could not but be so,—
Half waking, half asleep, I dreamed a dream
All of sweet nothings in a stellar stream;
I thought that we were wed, and that our home
Was fathoms deep beneath the ocean foam,
Coral the walls, the floor mosaic shell,
The ceiling pearl, where many a milky bell
And ruby boss were formed of strange sea-flowers,
And the child was no longer mine but ours,—
So foolishly I dreamed, until my bliss
Awoke me to the memory of your kiss.”

Silent she fell and struggled to retain
Composure and a mastery o'er pain,
But soon resumed, “Alas! The morning mail
Descended as the hot relentless flail
Falls on the luckless grain, that erst so fair
Swung and coquetted in the golden air,
But now lies broken, torn and indistinct,
Its use and beauty ruthlessly dislinked,—
I would I loved a slighter, smaller soul
Than thou art, one less able to control
The rampant self within, for Oh! I fear
Thy righteousness, thy dark stern justice, dear!—
But you must have the letter,—take it,—there!
'Tis in my handkerchief,—I cannot bear
The paper's actual contact.”

Theodore

Snatched up the missive, avidly out tore
The meaning, clenched and crushed it in his hand,—
A lightning stroke's not hard to understand!—
Then wordless walked away.

A woman seeks

Some one to witness her wet eyes and cheeks,
Less poignant suffers, groweth almost calm
'Neath the cool sympathetic oil and balm;
But man wears through his dark and bitter mood
In unshared anguish, decent solitude,
So Theodore, the letter in his hand,
Paced out of sight along the wave-washed sand.

And to Louise the ocean's cannon-boom
Solemnly voiced irrefragable doom.

XV.

IF there is in the turmoil chaotic and drear,
 The sterile sick waste of this lunatic sphere,
 One wise regulation, one blessed decree,
 With which doth the present scribe fully agree,
 'Tis the bondage of woman,—the dictum that free
 As a man or an eagle she never shall be,—
 'Tis true she possesses a separate mind
 And physical structure, and some have opined
 That her nature, like man's, is a tripartite whole,
 And includeth a single responsible soul;
 Be that as it may, still the fact doth remain
 Undeniably sure that a man may disdain
 To burden existence with sweetheart or wife,
 And minus their blandishments live out his life
 Sanely, serenely, yea, nobly withal,
 While a woman—Have not you at eve heard the call
 Of the wood pigeon unto her absentee mate
 With its passionate pleading, its heartbreaking freight
 Of lament? Even so, there existeth no maid,
 Gold crowned or gray misted, whose heart is not swayed
 By even such need as the dove's note displayed,
 Who faces life's gloaming alone, unafraid,
 Who feels not the world is bereft of its charms,
 Is but valueless frippery, save as the arms
 Of a lover enfold her, save but as his smile
 Shall her life cordialize and render worth while,—
 It is true that some notable lives have been seen
 Of women unwed, as the great Virgin Queen,
 Bonheur, Nightingale, and a few maidens more,
 Some ten or a dozen, or haply a score,—

In accord with the maxim we all learned at school,
There are brilliant exceptions to every rule!

Yes, 'tis well we are bound; but there never lived slave
Who did not at his fetters froth-frenzying rave,
Nor robber who deemed not his carceral cell
Contrived of the devil, unmerited hell,—
'Tis the natural order that women should fret
At the bondage they cannot one moment forget,
Should fume at their crosses, should all but despair
At the trials 'tis duty and glory to bear.

Woman chafes overmuch at subjection to *one*,—
But how if a mischievous wizard hath spun
A net that no fingers but Death's shall undo,
That holdeth her captive and creature of *two*?

It was written of old that a man shall not serve
Two masters; but often a woman must nerve
Herself to the bearing a dread double yoke,
For haply the being who earliest woke
Her heart's young affection, who still all her love
Receives, all the rhapsodic treasure thereof,
May not be the comrade in whom she discerns
A soul unto which her soul utterly yearns,
Who is more than a man, is a man deified,
Elder brother, mahatma, and star-steady guide.

It oft happens so,—the material bond
Narcotizes the spirit beneath its sweet wand,
And oft from a stranger a woman will find
That tribute of honest respect for her mind
Which her lord never pays; it is balm, it is bliss

To commune with a man who will not by a kiss
Interrupt, and so shatter to fragments the tower
Of noble aspirings to progress and power.

We must smile at the wives who in innocent pride
Aver that in marriage all potencies bide,
All human relationships are in that one
Encinctured, as light springeth all from the sun,—
So it may be for them; but it scarce seems a thing
One would from the house-top exultantly sing!

Well, well, to my story: 'Tis sad when the days
Wane weakly and die in a thick foggy haze,
And the late garden-blossoms surrender, frost-banned,
And we know that the end of the summer's at hand;
It is sad when whate'er we have loved to a close
Draweth on, when the season arrives for the rose
To be plucked, to be pressed, to be withered away
Till its fragrance is fled and its pink petals gray,
So I linger—I linger—

Poor wretched Louise
Would have sworn when that letter first traplike did seize
On her soul that she only was bound to one man,
And that man not her husband; but as the hours ran
Into days, she reluctantly went o'er the ground
Of the past, and, revolted, incredulous, found
She still was engirt by the galling steel mesh
That corrodes, but drops not, till the dropping of flesh.

But the letter—the letter? 'Twas only to state
That executive clemency haply should 'bate,
Not so much in respect of repentance sincere,

Good conduct, nor yet that excessive, severe,
Was the sentence, but chiefly, nay, solely because
Of the fact that the outrage of physical laws
Its own punishment carries,—the State would forego
Its right, and withdraw, nor o'erlook the last throe,—
If her husband were pardoned, could *she*, too, forgive?
Would she help him to die? or it might be, to live?

XVI

XVI.

THEY paced the beach at eve; but of the two
Sweet shapes who walked with them all summer through
But one remained; frail gauzy Joy, o'erblown
By destiny's Euroclydon, had flown
Far to the west, though still her vesture white
Made a soft star upon the purple night,—
The faithful one was Love, the king of kings,
Most piteous changed, for sad his golden wings
Trailed down behind him, and childwise he kept
His little arm across his brows, and wept.

Now, unexpected, was the season here
For garnering heart's harvest of the year,—
Now was the crucial hour that should reveal
Whether to keenly think and deeply feel
Was all Louise from Theodore had learned,
Or also strength to do a task she spurned.

She could not glimpse the smallest circumstance
That lured her—led her—called her back to Lance,—
She might go if but he were sure to die,—
But no,—that was, like all his life, a lie,
A clever sham,—once free, he would abide
Wickedly well, till all the world had died,—
No,—she would not, for fifty fevered years,
Sully her soul with Lance's lies and leers.

And the child's innocence,—the precious child!
How could the mother's heart be reconciled
To the subjecting that young ermine life

To foul contaminations, reeking rife
With shame? The boy would find it hard at best—
A gnawing fox within his tender breast—
To live, his father so disgraced hid far away,—
Intolerable, if from day to day
He saw a monstrous Frankenstein within
His home, a living shame, incarnate sin.

And then herself, neglected and betrayed,
Could she forget how impious he made
Her and her love a city's laughing stock,
A thing for Vice to gibber at and mock?
He had despised the virgin bloom he culled,
Though naught had yet its morning lustre dulled,
Though still 'twas fresh and dewy in the sun,—
Had ridiculed her to that other one—

Said Theodore, "Never since time began,
Among the fickle light-loved race of Man,
Lived one who jested of his wife with her
Who might a space his pulse ignobly stir."

A mere detail,—the issue's point was this:
If their positions were reversed, amiss
Her steps, not his, had strayed,—would he forgive?
Great Heaven, no! He would not let her live,—
And justly, too! We do not even call
Him who condones such faults a man at all,—
A miserable dotard! She had heard
Somewhere long since the strong old naming word,—
But it was different, she knew, with men,—
It is ordained that o'er and o'er again
Men may give way to appetites inflamed,

Nor be for it one tithe so bitter blamed
As is a wife who reckless lets her hand
Be but an instant by a lover's spanned;
'Tis idle to complain; this was the way
Of the world-reprobate ere Cæsar's day.

But what she chiefly dreaded was to grow
Inured to shame and be contented so,—
A woman's weak, and in the long, long years
Might lose the source of salutary tears,
Might sink to slothful and soul-numbing ease,
Might be not Theodore's and God's Louise,
But a mere flaccid despicable drone,
Who once had equal shared a kingly throne.

She would not say she never had loved Lance,—
Long had she loved him in a spiritual trance,
Ardently, utterly; and lion-strong
Is habit; O the horror and the wrong
If with an Indian summer love once more
She grew to love as she had loved of yore!

But if she ne'er were happy,—if her life
Were but a battle-ground of civil strife,—
If unto death these forces still opposed,
Still furious glared and with a shock still closed
Each upon each?—If, leopard-fierce, her heart
They clawed and wrangled for, and tore apart?

She wanted happiness,—she panted so
Life's best elixir, rose-distilled, to know!
Perhaps there was no heaven, no second birth,—
Ah, ah! to die, when one has wasted earth,

Earth and its rapture-chances cobweb frail,
Its goldenrod, its lilies passion-pale,—
Too soon the gurgling death is in the throat,—
Who dares push Joy from out the sinking boat?

But Theodore of course was wholly free,—
He need not marry her,—she knew that he
Despised her, a mere trencher morsel cold,—
All that she asked was the peace should enfold
Her and the child, just quietly to stay
At Barham Beach,—or she would go away
If he himself wished longer there to bide,
Anywhere, anywhere in the world wide,
Begging her way if need be, would she go,
Excepting to her husband.

No, Oh no!

Could she then greet him and her lips uplift
To his, let her whole being downward drift
To a low union, when the memory of his past
Embraces was as a sirocco-blast
Across her, as a rutilant dark stain
Upon her soul, which all the leaping main
Could never wash away? Could she endure
To share that shrunk future mean and poor?
Could she beside him ramble, sing and smile,
Stifling a prayer for his swift death the while?
Could she his prison-plaints full patient hark,
Could she survive the convict's cringe to mark,—
Could she live on, all high ambitions stilled,
One hateful duty steadfastly fulfilled?

Said Theodore, as when a good sword rings
'Gainst armor, "Yes! You can do all these things!"

XVII.

A long, long silence followed. Theodore,
Heartsick with pity for herself and him,
Scarce had the courage to urge o'er and o'er
Her husband's plea and all her own unlimb,—
Better it seemed the pardoned wretch should crawl,
Vermin, and maimed at that, out of the sun,
To the dark crevice of some crumbling wall,
Alone to languish till his day was done,
Where no sweet sound should enter, but the wind,
In everlasting restless ebb and flow,
Should mournful mind him of the sin he sinned,
And of youth's ecstasies, dead long ago,—
Better were surely this than that Louise
Should subjugated be to life-long pain,—
Than that himself be left with but the lees
Of the red wine another's lips should drain,—
But swift he rose superior,—smiled to feel
What force dwelt in the ancient epigram,
Which, stronger than the grip of hindering steel,
Stays oft the robber with its "one ewe lamb!"

She could not fathom, Theodore averred,
What would her husband's desolation be,—
If later by a moon or twain the word
Had spoken been that was to set him free,
She even, she the wife to whom he cried,
Sole heart to whom he breathed appealing speech,
Would have become another's laughing bride,
Gliding forever from his frantic reach;
He—Theodore—regretted from his soul

Their union was not an accomplished fact,
The future safe from tricky Fate's control,
The past, a misty, dim, forgotten tract,—
But no,—there yet was time and chance to poise
Duty imperative, its needled crown,
'Gainst the rose-garland's scarce resisted joys,
White Winter 'gainst rich Autumn gold and brown,—
What was love given for if not to make
Those whom it blest more selfless and more true?
What though the heart should never cease to ache,
So it more noble and more generous grew?
Many there were to whom the trial fire
Came never, whom God cared not to assay
In the white furnace of a resined pyre,
Whether they cringed or boldly stood at bay,
But he and she were called,—a loud command
Swept like a northern wind athwart the sea
Upon their hearts,—a stern unswerving hand
Told where the parting of the ways must be.

Lance would emerge from duress broken down,
No soul so poor to do him reverence more,
Unplaced forever in the busy town,
For him no hand outstretched, no open door,—
She must protect him,—she must stand between
The shrinking outcast and the world's cold scorn,—
She must be as a merciful soft screen
'Twixt the galled flesh and goad of platted thorn;
If it were true that he was soon to die,—
If he from prison came but to his grave,—
It was her sacred duty to stand by
Until the end, his burning brow to lave,
His hands to clasp, never to let him drift

Out to the fathomless dark sea of death
Alone, but his faint spirit to uplift
With close affection to his latest breath,—
And more,—e'en as he sad and hopeless lay,
The weary fretted tenant all but gone,
The tyrant lusts of earth all put away,
She must speak to him not of death but dawn,—
Into his darkened soul she must instil
Clear faith in God and in the after-time,—
Tell him of the supreme Eternal Will,
Tell him how earth's wrecked victims shall upelimb
Steadily, surely onward, nor shall miss
The happy righting of some future's chance,
Shall dwell at last in those abodes of bliss
God made for all His children,—even Lance!

But if indeed he did not die, but live,—
If his sore illness was a cunning mask,—
'Twas but to say Almighty God did give
To her a nobler and a harder task:
To teach a loathing of his former sin,
Not its mere consequent and bitter fruit,
Gently to plead and tenderly to win
Sweet melody from heart-strings rusty-mute,—
First teach himself himself to execrate,
Who had so foully all his manhood marred,
Who reckless drew on him a city's hate,
Became a thing to be knout-scourged and scarred;—
Then help him to live down that frightful past,
That wicked self, help him to gain again
Not only his lost self-respect,—at last
E'en the amazed respect of other men.

Were her own skirts quite clear, then? were they free
From smirches and from old temptation's grime?
Alas! too many foolish wives there be,
Whose low ambitions point the way to crime,—
Had she been one of these?—a flippant soul
Proud of the gaudy decking of her frame,
A brilliant equipage her highest goal,
A sordid overshadowing all her aim,—
Had she not been too fond of chaff and straw,
Had she not shared what profit did accrue
From Lance's sin? Why, then, by every law
Of justice she should suffer for it, too!

'Twas true, as she had said: With undue weight
The world on women visits certain sins,—
With the first kiss unblest of church and state
A never-ending punishment begins,—
But here the case exactly was reversed,—
Scot-free she might escape if so she would,
Leaving her partner leprous-lone, accurst,—
This cowardice she might do—if she could!

As for the woman Lance had wrongly sought,
She was a creature of an outworn life,
Vanished and melted utterly to naught,—
Henceforth the world's one woman was his wife;
How could an honorable wife know grief
Or jealousy because of such a thing,
Whose gorgeous empire was as piteous-brief
As is the flashing of a fire-fly's wing?

As for the child,—he was his father's child,
And Lance had to the end a natural right

To what sweet solace, what assuaging mild
Lay in communion with that spirit white,—
It was his right to gaze within those eyes
Which would not judge him, would not stare him down,
His right to hear the laugh of joy's surprise,
The welcome precious as a kingly crown,—
His right the little soft embrace to feel,
His right to have and hold the body sweet,
From pure caresses and fond words to steal
Whate'er might smooth the way before his feet.

She must go back to Lance. 'Twas God required
Her to perform this sacrificial deed,—
'Twas not that she had promised and aspired
To love and honor,—these were past, indeed,—
But since a wretched overburdened soul
In last extremity and utter woe,
In body's wasting and in spirit's dole,
Cried out to her, 'twas therefore she must go,—
She shrank from thrusting Joy out of the boat,
But let joy perish, 'twas a bagatelle,
An atomy, an inconspicuous mote,
Not to be counted, which 'twere more than well
Laughing to strangle, carelessly to drown,
If one gained opportunity to save
Expiring hope and faith from sinking down
Into the dusty purlieus of the grave,—
'Tis only in the finite we can see
The infinite; 'tis but in human love
Alone the pale faint mirroring may be
Of the deep tenderness of God above,—
When love enfolds us, God is very near,
A gentle friend, a brother, and our own,—

When love is banished, distantly and drear
He looms, a white majestic carven stone.

Lance trusting called, not trusting overmuch
In the strong sweetness of the woman's make,—
He, a poor lazar, whom no hand would touch
Sooner than aid a spotted dying snake,—
He called with deep unalterable love
To her, the only human creature left
In all the weary world and wastes thereof
Of whom he deemed himself not quite bereft,—
He called to her as unto God on high,—
His written words had shaken like a reed,—
Called with the hoarse exceeding bitter cry
Of a doomed creature in the hour of need.

The while of their sad talk it had grown late,—
The midnight moon sailed silver overhead,
Seeming to bear within her arms a freight
Of solemn ceremonies for the summer dead;
Already grief-engraven cruel deep,
White were the faces of the wretched twain,—
Honor invincible alone did keep
Them severed, not a forceless broken chain,—
Now and again a bursting sob would rise
Up from the woman's breast and break in tears,
And on the man's pale features and sad eyes
The shadow lay of coming loveless years.

At last Louise low murmured "Theodore!
Unto my doom, to crucifixion slow,
Lingering, inexorable, nevermore
To see your face, O love, my love! I go!"

XVIII

XVIII.

FOR the last time of many times the four
Gathered about the bined and berried door
To speed the parting guest. He clasped the hand
Of the old farmer-fisher rough and tanned,
And thanked him for his hope that once again
From out the tangling knotted web of men
Theodore might slip, and boy-like run away
To spend with them another holiday.
He kissed the withered cheek of the old wife,
Whose voluble attachment was at strife
With deep regret and sense of pending ill,
For not so aged was she but that still
She read the other woman's face, its weight
Of anguish utterless and desolate.
He held the boy upon his shoulder high,
Who lisped against his cheek, "Bye, Doro, bye!"
Laughing commanded him to come back soon,
And begged as ever some thrice-valued boon,
While the man coveted what he caressed,
This gem a felon lawfully possessed,
And a thought stung his eyes with angry brine,
"But now there never will be child of mine!"

Then to Louise he turned his latest look,
But she back started, willful-sudden shook
Her head, refused her hand; then, breathing fast,
Over the sill and through the yard she passed,—
Down to the lane and its great gate she led,
Since where they met their parting must be said.

Parting! that tells it all! If you who read
Have parted with a dear one, known indeed
What 'tis to hear the breeze, the billows' roar,
The birds, the bees, but whisper "Nevermore!"—
To steal away at midnight, not to sleep,
But brokenly through half the night to weep,—
If the first thought that pierces in the dawn
Is of sun-gilded mornings past and gone,—
If the gold noontide brilliance cannot wile
The heart from dwelling on a vanished smile,—
If you have known all this, you have no need
More than those pregnant syllables to read,
"Parting!" The word hath wizard's power to call
Out of its grave the saddest ghost of all.

If you have never known it, that is well,—
Fate spares you here the keenest pang of hell.

She had a fancy, culled from tender rhymes,
That Theodore should kiss her but three times;
The first should be for Joy, the second, Pain,
The third for Death, since suddenly in twain
The thread of either's life might sharp be cut,
And a great stone love's sepulchre make shut,—
Her speech he heard, but seemed as he not heard,
Scorning her little foolish timid word,—
What? would three kisses, only three, outlast
The desert dearth of all the future vast?
His lips upon hers dwelt till he forgot
Almost that parting was their wretched lot,—
As a last sunray in a blackening sky,
As a man singeth on his way to die,
As in a churchyard blooms the myrtle pale,

So were their kisses mixt of bliss and bale;
And at the last 'twas only poor Louise
Who sudden fortitude and force did seize,
Perceiving what was difficult would grow
Impossible if long he kissed her so,
And thrust him from her, saying "Hasten, dear,—
Let not the weary night still find you here!"

Of what avail to chronicle the last
Sweet strangled utterance that 'tween them passed?
He sprang to saddle, reckless rode away
As to the death-bed of the sinking day,—
But having ridden so a little space,
Turning, he saw her stand with hidden face
Against the gate, and all the westering sun
Redly did gild her shape as it had done
That day of days, that hour of hours, that first
Ecstatic moment when a vision burst
Upon him, when the sweetness of love's rose
Did richly for his beggared heart uncloze,—
Drooping she stood, and there was in her mien
All melancholy difference between
Maidhood and widowhood, 'twixt jocund spring
And frosty winter bleak and shivering,—
Her attitude was as the strongest word
Of yearning, and straight back to her he spurred:

"Louise! I dare not go without you, love!
Life is a hell-broth and the fumes thereof
Are as the curling pennons of despair
That rides me down and soon will over-bear
My strength and faith. I do not dare to live,
Unless, Louise, God and yourself can give

Some sweetness to my spirit's daily food,
A wholesome garnish and clear rectitude
To what seems poisoned now. Come, let us roam
Away together; I will make a home
For you and for the boy; become my wife,
Bring back sweet relevancy to my life,
That now is hideous discordant strife!"

Haggard she smiled: "Cold reason's overthrow
Hath come at last then, and you cannot go
Without me? If I said one little word,
Let myself be by woman's weakness stirred,
I might be with you alway, to the end?—
Thanks for this last complete surrender, friend!
But no,—too plain I saw 'twas Christlike right,
Divine deep truth you spoke the other night,—
'Tis my turn now, dear heart. I cannot stray
Through wood paths with you,—duty's in my way!—
And I have come at last to think of Lance
With deep, deep pity,—blessed be the chance
I have to comfort him!—And now, goodbye,—
In the long afterlife we shall learn why
Fate first united, then dragged us apart,—
God bless you, and goodbye, dear heart! dear heart!"

Once again Theodore turned sharp away,
"You do not love me!" all he had to say.

At this injustice silverly she laughed,
Remembering how oft a shameful shaft
Had pierced her, since too well he must have known
She gave her heart ere she had won his own.
"Not love you, Theodore? Well, that may be,—

At any rate, note quite so full and free
As now to dissipate and bring to naught
All the high steadfastness you have me taught,
To make this summer as it had not been,
To acquiesce in Judas' hateful sin,—
But let me closer come,—a moment wait!"

To him she hastened through the open gate,
Striving to speak, yet forced to hesitate,—
Silent she stood and stroked the horse's neck,—
Was it the sun, or did her own blood deck
Her cheeks so rosily? With eyes downcast
Like a mere maid's, she whispering spoke at last,
"My Theodore, my own! Because you had
This impulse to return, I'm very glad,—
Glad that one instant more than Right and Good
You loved me,—'tis my crown of womanhood!
And dearer are you with this earthly taint
Than when you seemed a high untempted saint!"

She caught and kissed his hand,—it was withdrawn,
Laid on her hair in blessing—He was gone!
Gone to a future of achievements bright,
Leaving Louise to Barham Beach and night.

XIX



XIX.

HE rode with bent head, asking over at length
Had it been superhuman and splendid, his strength,
As a god's, or but as the inhuman brute force
Of a giant, crass blindness its generant source?
One could equably bear it, the being more strong
Than the rest of one's race, if there did not belong
As a penalty keen of that coveted state
The need to be strong for all others,—to wait
The shock of necessitous cries,—to assume
The burdens of many,—to hasten their doom
Or avert it, to settle their right and their wrong,—
Ah, weary the duties of one who is strong!

Ah, well, it was over! that sweet summer's joy
Was put out of his life like a child's broken toy,—
His life? could he call it a life, where misrule
Was the one constant factor? where he, doting fool,
Ever desperate struggled the claims to adjust
'Twixt claimants bejeweled and matted with dust,
And where if he left but one moment the helm
Anarchy's tempest leaped wild to o'erwhelm,—
Was it life, in the tumult and torment whereof
Never he saw or should see again Love?

He rode by the haunts she had hallowed,—the hills,
The gold-gleaming woods with their little white rills,—
How it had pleased her, whene'er through the dark
A fire-fly wafted its quivering spark!—
On he rode, growing ever more wearily sad,
Till suddenly out of the gloaming a lad

Ran eager to meet him, to give to his hand
A message the wires had flashed over the land
To Louise; he received and tore out the dispatch,
Read it through by the flickering flame of a match,
Read the ten words laconic and fateful that burned
On his brain, and then solemnly, slowly he turned
And rode back.

She was still standing there in the lane,
And her countenance, dulled and disfigured by pain,
Lighted not when she saw him.

“Why have you come back?
Are you then but a galloping wolf on my track?
When I hear the long howls and the hoofs that pursue
Shall I look up to see it is you, only you?—
'Tis a ghost that you are, and why cannot you stay
In the earth where heartbroken I laid you away?
Do not touch me or kiss me, for shall I not rave
At the feel of the chill and the slime of the grave?—
Oh, Theodore, shameful it is and unfair
That you come back to witness my grief and despair,—
Would you number my sobs and the tears that I shed?
Must that terrible parting a third time be said?”

“Darling, I leave you no more: He is dead!”

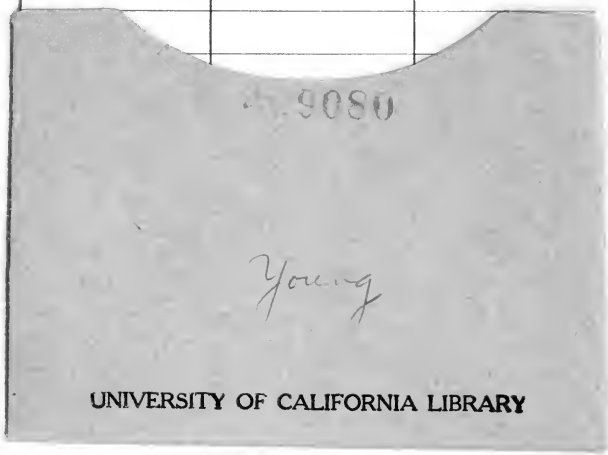


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